

**School Organizational Solutions (SOS), LLC**

**Evaluation of the  
Indianapolis Mayor Sponsored  
Charter Schools**

**Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA)  
South**

**Second Year Site Visit**

**11/19/2014**

**Conducted by:**

**Dr. Terrence Harewood**

**Cheryl McLaughlin**

**Lucy Witte**

## **Second Year Site Visit Report**

**Completed by Members of School Organizational Services (SOS), LLC**

**Name:** Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA) South

**Date of Review:** 11/19/2014

**Year in the charter contract:** Year Two

**Site visit evaluation team members:** Dr. Terrence Harewood, Cheryl McLaughlin, and Lucy Witte

**Sub-questions addressed in review:**

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?
- 4.2 Are the teaching pedagogies consistent with the school's mission?
- 4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?
- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?
- 4.9 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with special needs?
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related access and services to students with limited English proficiency?

Second Year Review: The following report provides key findings from Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA) South based upon the second year site review conducted by School Organizational Solutions (SOS), LLC. Team members Cheryl McLaughlin, Lucy Witte, and Terrence Harewood, completed one day each of classroom observations, special education file review, and stakeholder interviews and document reviews in order to address the performance indicators of the Mayor's Charter School Performance Framework.

The process for this evaluation is iterative and the report, along with follow-up meetings, is designed to corroborate information provided to regulatory bodies and to provide useful feedback to the Mayor's office, school leaders and stakeholders.

The judgments in the report are based upon evidence collected during the process of the school visits. As stated in the Site Visit Protocols for Mayor-Sponsored Charter Schools: "Evidence comes from observations, interviews, and document reviews. The site visit evaluation team should build a base of evidence for each of its findings that would reasonably lead any set of individuals to come to a similar judgment of the school's programs and practices."

## Key Interpretations

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.2 Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?  
Finding: **Approaching Standard**
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?  
Finding: **Approaching Standard**
- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?  
Finding: **Does Not Meet Standard**
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?  
Finding: **Approaching Standard**
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to English as a Second Language (ESL) students?  
Finding: **Meets Standard**

# Introduction

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On November 19, 2014, three site visitors conducted the 2014 review of Indiana Math and Science Academy (IMSA) South. IMSA South serves students from kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grades and is currently in its second year of operation. This report represents an evaluation about performance in each of the standards and indicators that are the responsibility of SOS, LLC to evaluate. These indicators: 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 are outlined in the Mayor's Performance Framework.

The Site Team engaged in a number of evidence-collecting activities. The focus of this site visit was to gauge perceptions of key stakeholders at the school in relation to the areas of the performance framework that are part of the evaluation. The team conducted focus group discussions with students, staff, special education instructor(s), and parents, as well as interviews with the school administrators. The site team also examined evidence that the school provided, in support of each of the Performance Framework indicators.

Dr. Terrence Harewood and Cheryl McLaughlin conducted observations of all classrooms and teachers at IMSA South, prior to the Site Team Visit. Lucy Witte, who has experience and expertise as a Special Education Director spent a full day reviewing Special Education files and English Language Learner (ELL) files and observed the special education teachers interacting with students prior to the site team visit.

In the following report, standards and indicators are listed with relevant evidence given related to the performance criteria. Following the discussion of each indicator, a summary of strengths and areas for attention are provided for the core questions.

## **Key Interpretations**

### **4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?**

#### **Finding: Meets Standard**

##### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

The SOS, LLC site team observed evidence and heard reports from teachers and school leaders during the site visit, which showed IMSA South uses a curriculum that is provided by the Concept Schools Network. It is aligned with Common Core standards and Indiana standards and is continually updated at the network level to stay current with those standards. The Concept Network has systematized and institutionalized its curriculum development process by utilizing a Connect Ed program, which provides scope and sequence and curriculum mapping online for teachers. Teachers are given the concept or standard to teach (within a suggested timeframe) and they must develop lesson plans and vocabulary to teach the standard. Teachers reported that they have access to online Grade Level instructional coaches and Departmental Directors who are able to help them plan lessons and give advice on instructional strategies. Teachers are required to post their own lesson plans to the online program. The lesson plans are reviewed locally by the administration, and at the district level by the curriculum team. The network program also disseminates score percentages from the standardized testing programs to teachers. Teachers have the option of modifying lessons or tweaking them based on the developmental readiness of their students. Teachers described a comprehensive, continuous improvement process where lessons are designed based on analysis of student assessment data.

##### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- Teachers reported that they felt secure in knowing what to teach on a daily, weekly, and monthly schedule, through the Concept School online curriculum scope and sequence.
- Classroom observations showed that a majority of classrooms had posted state standards.
- The Site team saw evidence of an organized curriculum that included resources such as McGraw Hill and Houghton Mifflin textbooks.
- All teachers reported that they have the ability to modify and customize the curriculum to better serve their students.
- Teachers, including SPED teachers, believe it is a high quality curriculum with ample resources.

##### **Areas for Improvement:**

- Some teachers (especially teachers new to the network and/or lesser experienced teachers) reported that the curriculum did not offer enough structure and was not “scripted” enough for them.

**Recommendation:**

- IMSA South should consider implementing ongoing PD for teachers new to the network, focusing on using the Concept Curriculum program.

## **4.2 Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school’s mission?**

### **Finding: Approaching Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

Data gathered during classroom observations provided key insights in assessing this standard. Two classroom observers spent 6 hours and 30 minutes each at the school, observing 247 students and 16 teachers (3 more were observed during the site day visit) in grades K through 8 at IMSA South. On average, each observation lasted 24 minutes and the observed student to teacher ratio was 15:1. Such detailed analysis and data produced significant evidence regarding pedagogical practices at Indiana Math and Science Academy South.

While classroom observations and teacher focus groups supported the fact that curriculum is being implemented in classrooms according to its design and instruction is focused on core learning objectives, the Site Team had concerns based on observations and stakeholder input that lessons, particularly in the upper grades, lacked rigor and often failed to engage students because of little or no differentiation and a lack of varied instructional strategies. On the other hand, the lower elementary classes (K-3) in a majority of the classrooms, were observed to utilize differentiated strategies and multiple instructional strategies that fully engaged the students.

The Indianapolis Math and Science Academies, and IMSA South in particular, lost key personnel this past fall. IMSA South lost their Assistant Principal at the end of September. This role was filled just two weeks prior to our site visit. The local network Curriculum Coach who had visited IMSA South frequently to coach and advise teachers on best practices in teaching pedagogies, had left her position over the summer which teachers reported had not been filled at the time of our Site Visit. Teachers said they missed her frequent visits and support. The principal informed us that this role

had just been filled and the new Instructional/Curriculum Coach would be starting in the immediate future, which should be helpful in assisting teachers with instructional strategies and improving pedagogies at IMSA South. Given the different levels of rigor observed between the upper and lower elementary classrooms, the site team adjudged the school as approaching this standard.

**Other Areas of Strength:**

- Lower elementary classrooms all had State Standards posted in the form of “I CAN” statements phrased so that young students understood what they were learning.
- A majority of the lower elementary teachers were observed to be utilizing varied instructional strategies and differentiation.
- A proficient use of technology by teachers and students was observed in all classrooms and at all levels.
- Individualized Computer Assisted Learning was observed being utilized by students in classrooms.

**Areas for Improvement:**

- During the site team observations less than 20% of learning activities observed, focused on higher order thinking/critical thinking skills, showing a lack of rigor in instructional strategies.
- Upper grade levels were observed to have little variation in instructional strategies and an overall lack of differentiation to engage students who have different learning styles.
- The Site team observed inconsistent implementation of STEM related processes or instructional strategies, which should exemplify the mission of IMSA South. Project Based Learning which is a key instructional strategy in teaching STEM subjects was rarely observed as an instructional strategy during the Site Team observations and Site Team visit
- Many students said they participated in the Robotics Club as an extra-curricular activity but most reported that they have rarely been assigned projects as instructional assignments in their classrooms this year.

**Recommendations:**

- The site team observed inconsistency between the lower elementary grades (K-3) and upper grades (4-8), in terms of the implementation of varied instructional strategies and utilization of differentiation. Professional Development, particularly for Grades 5 – 8 and/or peer teaching reviews, checking for successful implementation of multiple teaching strategies, higher order thinking skills and critical vocabulary would be useful for improvement in this standard.
- Though STEM education is part of the mission of IMSA South there was little evidence, beyond a proficient use of technology, and a Robotics club, that it was a part of the curriculum. The Concept School Network should consider offering a stronger focus for teachers, with online assistance in planning curriculum, to incorporate STEM strategies and projects into the curriculum so that it is implemented according to the mission of the school, focusing on STEM.

#### **4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support preparation for post-secondary options?**

This standard is not applicable for Indiana Math and Science Academy South since the school only serves students from grades kindergarten through eight.

#### **4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?**

##### **Finding: Meets Standard**

##### **Summary and Specific Commendations:**

The Site Team observed and heard reports from stakeholders that the Indiana Math and Science Academy South uses a comprehensive data driven system to guide and support instruction. The school regularly administers a wide variety of standardized and other assessments including NWEA, Dibels, Acuity, and ISTEP, as well as quizzes and teacher generated assessments. Teachers use the data from the NWEA to create a six-week plan for students focusing on standards that need to be re-taught. Computer assisted learning is utilized to help re-teach the standards and is individualized to student needs. Teachers reported that Math and English Title groups are formed based on data from the Dibels test.

Teachers reported that the test data is also used to modify scope and sequence if necessary and to change groupings of students, as well as seating arrangements in classrooms.

##### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- All teachers reported using a comprehensive data driven system to inform instruction.
- IMSA South effectively uses NWEA and ACUTY data to create a six week plan following each assessment, in order to modify curriculum and create Title Groups in English and Math, as well as computer assisted learning programs for individual students.
- Site Team members saw evidence of Data walls in most classrooms, which allowed students to track their own progress.
- SPED students kept individual data information charts.

##### **Recommendation:**



- Though school leaders and staff reported often that the school needs to improve test scores and raise their grade of D, the site team saw no evidence of a written or articulated academic goal for all teachers and students to strive to achieve. The school should create a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goal that is articulated for all stakeholders and is very visible to everyone. Posters, flyers, signs in the school, etc., should highlight the school's goal so that all stakeholders know the goal and are motivated to achieve it.

#### **4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?**

#### **Finding: Meets Standard**

##### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

Indiana Math and Science Academy South (IMSA) South is managed by Concept Schools, Inc., a Chicago based, not-for-profit charter management and consulting organization. As such the school benefits from a high level of support including a shared database with a standards-based curriculum, a shared Human Resource system, and jointly organized regional professional development sessions for its member schools. The network also plays an important role in recruiting and placing personnel, especially at the leadership level. The site team found that there is an explicit hiring and orientation process that is organized and used to support the success of new staff members. The school leader reported and the site team verified that all teachers are licensed and deployed in areas where they are certified to teach. The school leader also noted that the school has a performance-based evaluation system that incentivizes teachers who excel in the classroom. Teachers described the evaluation system as clear and helpful. They also mentioned the overwhelming support they received from the school leader. One teacher quipped, "I would be ecstatic if I could work for Mrs. Sparks for the rest of my life." While teachers were generally satisfied with the professional development offered by the network, the school should consider more localized professional development that is particularly aligned with the needs of the staff. The teachers also noted there is a dire need for additional staffing in order to provide support in the areas of behavioral management and English Language Learners. This evidence supports a meets standard.

##### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- School has a good hiring program (teacher institute) to orient teachers into the culture of the school.

- School also has a separate “new teacher” institute for new teachers
- School has a performance based evaluation system where teachers can earn up to \$2,000.
- Teachers described a comprehensive performance evaluation systems, including frequent
- Teachers reported they enjoyed a variety of professional development opportunities for input.

#### **Areas for Improvement:**

- Teachers expressed a desire for school-based professional development, customized to their own school’s needs.
- Teachers reported there is a need for additional staffing to support classroom management and English Language Learners.
- Teachers described staff having very low morale as a result of information shared regarding salary inequities among teachers.

#### **Recommendations**

- School should consider a formal mentoring process for new teachers.

#### **4.6. Is the school’s mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?**

#### **Finding: Approaching Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

According to the IMSA South website, the mission of the school is to “foster an environment of inquiry and a love of learning so students are prepared to thrive in STEM-focused high school, college, and the world.” However, the site team observed a markedly different mission statement printed in the student/parent handbook. Furthermore, the school leader explained that the network strives to have separately worded mission statements for the various types of stakeholders (staff, teachers, parents, for example). This complexity makes it challenging to interpret what the “true” mission of the school is. While it is apparent from the website that the school espoused a STEM-focus program, none of the stakeholders including teachers, students or parents mentioned such a focus during the focus group interviews. The site team was unclear about the mission statement having heard different descriptions by the stakeholders. The school should consider developing a singular, unifying framework or mission statement and clearly articulate it to its various stakeholders. Because the site team saw little evidence of knowledge or the STEM-focus curriculum, and apparent

little buy-in to this important aspect of the schools, mission, the site team adjudged the school as approaching this standard.

**Other Areas of Strength:**

- Stakeholders could generalize the portions of the mission statement relating to success for underserved populations and the school being college-bound.

**Areas for Improvement:**

- The student/parent handbook and the school's website do not articulate the same mission statement. There is a discrepancy between the two.
- The STEM focus appears to be a central part of the school's mission, however none of the stakeholders including the teachers, mentioned it as a part of the mission statement.

**4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?**

**Finding: Does Not Meet Standard**

**Summary and Specific Commendations**

The site team struggled to find evidence to support a conclusion that the climate at IMSA South is conducive to student and staff success. On paper, the school has a well-articulated three-tier school-wide behavioral management system, with clear consequences for student infractions. In practice, teachers are given leverage to implement rules and procedures as they see fit. Consequently, the site team observed and teachers complained about the significant lack of consistent implementation of the behavioral plan. The site team observed significant amounts of instructional time being lost due to the reactive discipline that was implemented in most of the classrooms. This was particularly evident in the upper grades of the school. Students complained that teachers often misapplied the software program, Class Dojo, a program designed to encourage and promote positive behaviors among students in the classroom. The site team observed primarily negative reactions to the application of Class Dojo and a change of student behavior was seldom brought about when teachers used it in the classrooms observed. As currently implemented, the behavioral management system employed by the school is a significant source of frustration for teachers, and appears to have an adverse effect on student learning. Students complained about the inconsistencies among and between the different teachers they see on a daily basis with regard to discipline. Teachers also reported having low morale due to tensions stemming from the behavioral

challenges in the classroom. To address classroom discipline, the school has instituted a “Reflection Room,” a version of in-school suspension, two days a week. Because students often have to wait two to three days before this consequence is applied, teachers report that this consequence is ineffective. The school should consider additional staffing to support a daily, in-school suspension program, if this is the method they choose to employ.

In summary, the current systems in place at IMSA South do not appear to produce a school climate conducive to student and staff success. The school should consider developing a more explicit behavior management system, and explicitly teach the expectations to all stakeholders, especially students and new teachers. The site team judged the school as does not meet standard.

#### **Areas of Strength:**

- School handbook lists a school-wide 3 tiered behavioral plan, which articulates different levels of infractions and consequences
- School is in the early stages of developing a comprehensive behavior plan focused on positive reinforcement.

#### **Areas for Improvement:**

- Site team observed:
  - Reactive discipline strategies in the majority of classrooms.
  - Inconsistent application of School-wide Behavioral Plan including questionable use of classroom DOJO
- Teachers reported:
  - Great frustration that there is not a well developed, consistently implemented and well-articulated behavioral management system in place.
  - They feel unsupported and expressed extremely low morale because of inconsistency.
  - Dean of Students is overwhelmed and cannot meet all the needs
- Students reported:
  - Significant inconsistencies among teachers’ discipline and that some teachers showed favoritism and questionable behavior
- Many stakeholders reported that the Reflection Room was ineffective.

#### **4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?**

**Finding: Meets Standard**

#### **Summary and Specific Commendations:**

School leaders, parents, and other stakeholders all report that there is “open and transparent” communication at IMSA South. When asked what forms of communication were used to communicate with them, parents replied, “We are communicated with in every way imaginable!” They cited texts, phone calls, emails, weekly newsletters, parent conferences, daily opportunities to talk to teachers if needed, and online access to their students’ grades, homework assignments, and attendance data, as well as formal progress reports every nine weeks.

Teachers, other instructional leaders, parents, and students, all reported that the school principal was approachable, caring, “always around the building”, and had an “Open Door policy”.

Communication with parents and stakeholders and involvement of parents was a real strength at IMSA South. The team adjudged the school as meets this standard.

**Other Areas of Strength:**

- All parents reported having outstanding communication with the teachers, staff, and school leader at IMSA South.
- The school leader is very well-liked by students, teachers, parents, and school staff. Parents said they “love her open door policy” and report that she is a “hands on” leader who cares about all students.
- School uses PowerSchool which is accessible to all stakeholders
- Teachers report and evidence supported, that teachers must make twelve home visits during the year and log the visits.
- Some parents reported that they were involved as advocates for IMSA South through a Parent Ambassador program.
- Parents also said there were multiple ways they could be involved at the school and cited opportunities to serve as chaperones on field trips and in the after school program and the school book fair.
- The school has a Parent University where parents are taught how to use Power School and other forms of technology.
- School conferences are held in the evening and on Saturdays with child care services offered, to assist parents in attending and to offer the flexibility to meet parents’ needs.
- The Site team saw evidence of documents (school application and information documents) translated into other languages to provide communication for ELL parents.

**Recommendations:**

None

#### 4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?

##### Finding: Approaching Standard

##### Summary and Specific Commendations:

A comprehensive review of all 41 special education files at IMSA South was conducted. This review provided critical information regarding general trends in the documentation and delivery of special education services at the school. IMSA South was found to have instituted numerous systems in compliance with state and federal mandates regarding special education. The school has in place an individual file for each student receiving special education services. These files were also neatly organized and in a locked file cabinet. The school participates in and utilizes the Indiana IEP (IIEP) electronic program. From the file review it appeared that all case conference meetings were held in a timely manner. There were previously held case conference reports and IEPs on move-in students in these files.

The site team also noted significant areas of concern. The delivery of special education services is a highly sensitive aspect of a school and one that can be potentially litigious and costly. It is important to keep in mind in the area of special education that “policies and procedures are our friends as they protect us in what we do best.” Consequently, schools are encouraged to be proactive in ensuring that the appropriate documentation is made and available upon request. The site team found several areas of incomplete, missing, or discrepant information, which led to a judgment of approaching this standard. For example, important documents were missing in the students’ files, and there was no apparent system in place to verify participants at case conferences. The most significant concern noted was that 93% (38) of the students with disabilities (SWDs) at IMSA South had a federal placement code of LRE 50. The site team observed that three of the 41 students with disabilities had the federal placement code of LRE 51–, which were changed during the move-in conferences. Also five of the students with disabilities had their federal placement code changed from a more restrictive environment to a lesser restrictive environment once they moved to IMSA South. The school’s special education director confirmed such changes. LRE, acronym for Least Restrictive Environment, is a federal entitlement which specifies the level of potential need for systemic services provided to students in regular educational environments. Article 7, Code -511 IAC 7-42-8(e), outlines specific procedures by which changes to a student’s LRE score can be made. Essentially, schools are to accept a student’s LRE score at the time of move-in and changes can only be made after a period of observation and re-evaluation. Those changes are made based on students’ needs. As a best practice and in compliance with the law, the school should make sure that it is following this important legal standard. ~~The generalization from this extensive review is that these IEPs become and are individualized and based on student needs as opposed to a coding that is convenient for the school. Also five of the students with disabilities had their federal placement code changed from a more restrictive environment to a lesser restrictive environment once they moved to IMSA South.~~ This evidence led the site team to ponder the following questions: Is there

~~a denial of FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education)? Do the students with disabilities at IMSA South receive services based on the school and staffing needs and not those of the individual student? These serious unanswered questions led to a judgment of approaching the standard.~~

### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- The school utilizes the state electronic IEP system so that all legally required topics are included.
- The files for students with disabilities are kept in a secure location with a system in place for signing them out if reviewed by staff members.
- The special education files are well organized.
- The special education coordinator was present and available to answer questions and to clarify procedural questions.
- All files had previous case conference reports/IEPs on move-in students.
- Each folder had a Student Data Chart in the student's folder to provide historical data.
- Based on the data observed in the files, all case conference meetings were held in a timely manner.

### **Areas for Improvement:**

- No educational evaluations were present in student files for 11/41 (27%). The site team realizes that receiving these evaluations from previous schools can be challenging. However diligence in this area is recommended so the case conference committee can always make informed decisions.
- FBA/BIP data is minimally documented. The Indiana IEP is minimally compliant in this area. A more rigorous and data-rich FBA/BIP is recommended and made easily available to all staff. Perhaps this revised FBA/BIP could then be attached to the IEP. Majority of the public schools has such a process in place.
- 50% of the student files reviewed did not have any Notice of Case Conference meetings. IEP participants did not sign in that they were actually at the conference so there was no documented system in place to verify who was actually present at the case conference. In several files it was noted that the TOR also held the role of PAR (Public Agency Representative). These two roles are mutually exclusive and must be held by two separate individuals. Article 7 is explicit on the required members of a case conference meeting.
- In the file review it was noted in the case conference decisions on harmful effects that majority of students with disabilities lost their "specials" in order to receive special education services. It is recommended that the practice be reviewed and consideration be given to "push-in"/inclusive services.

- There was no documentation in the review of student files that families had received the required IEP Goal Progress Reports. The school should review this practice to achieve compliance.

#### **4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations to access and services to students with limited English?**

#### **Finding: Meets Standard**

##### **Summary and Specific Commendations**

At the time of the site visit, IMSA-S had 2 students with limited English proficiency. To access this standard, the site team examined evidence of a process in place that would easily facilitate services to such students in a timely and legal way. In both student files there was the LAS Links Proficiency Report, the Home Language Survey, and the ILP (Individual Language Plan). However in both folders there was no evidence of a Letter Home to Parents. A finding of meets standard was warranted.

##### **Other Areas of Strength:**

- ENL files reviewed contained Las Links, ILP and Home Language Survey

##### **Areas of Improvement:**

- No letter home to parent in file.

##### **Recommendation:**

- School needs a more systematic approach to providing ENL services.